CHAPTER TEN
The Later Nineteenth-century Theatre 186

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Ibsen, Chekhov and the Theatre of Ideas 214

CHAPTER TWELVE
The Modern Theatre 240

Notes on the Illustrations 271

Select Bibliography 283

Index 285

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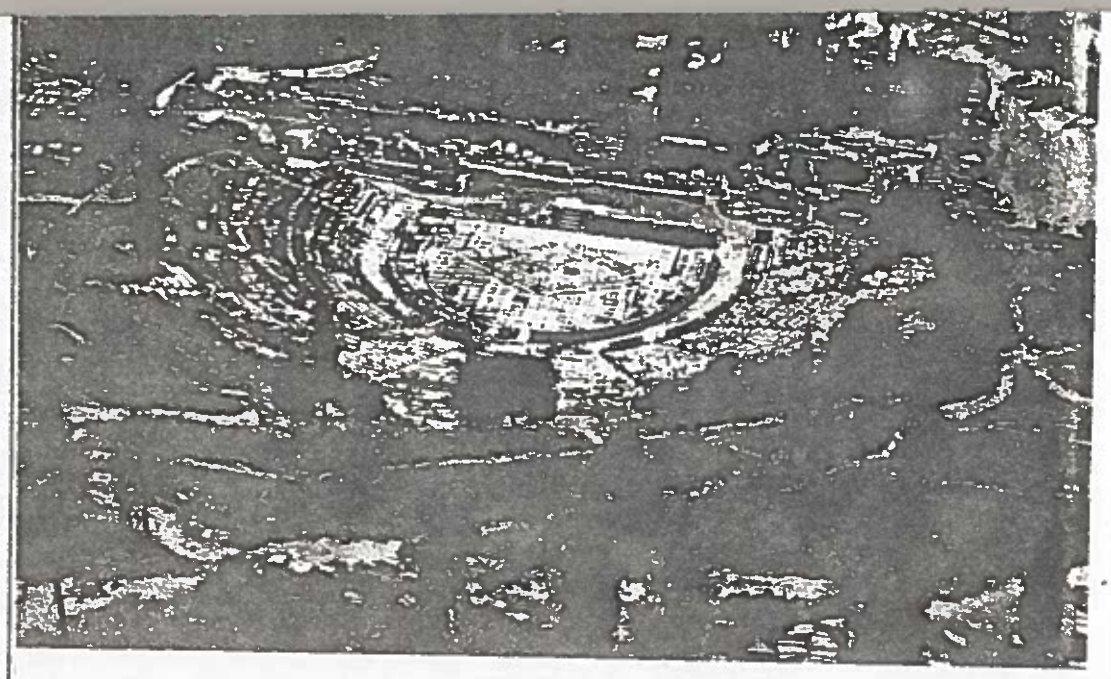
CHAPTER ONE

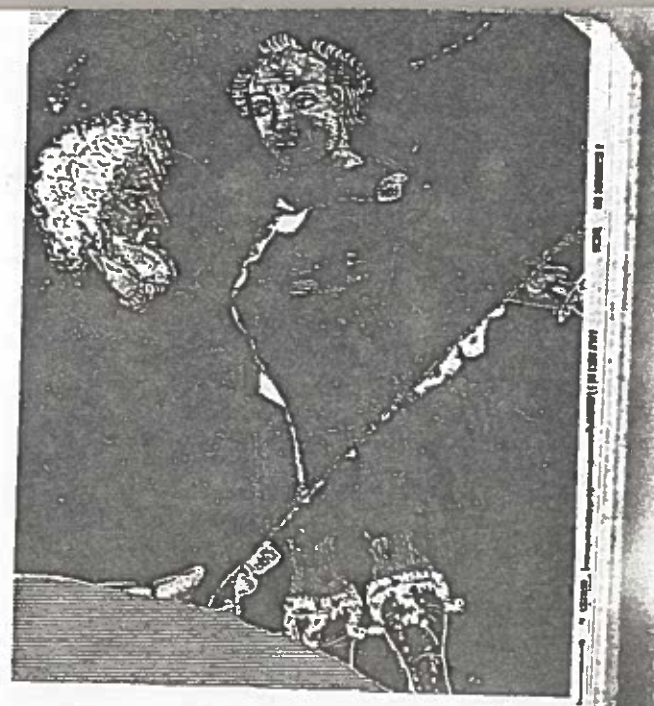
The Greek and Roman Theatre

The origins of the theatre go back far into the past, to the religious rites of the earliest communities. Throughout the history of mankind there can be found traces of songs and dances in honour of a god, performed by priests and worshippers dressed in animal skins, and of a portrayal of his birth, death and resurrection. Even now similar ceremonies can be discovered among primitive peoples. But for the theatre as we understand it today three things are necessary: actors speaking or singing independently of the original unison chorus; an element of conflict conveyed in dialogue; and an audience emotionally involved in the action but not taking part in it. Without these essential elements there may be religious or social ceremonies, but not theatre. It has been argued that the earliest extant Egyptian texts for funerals and coronations, some dating as far back as 3000 BC, are really plays. But an order of service for a coronation in which the king is crowned by the high priest is not a playscript. The event is firmly rooted in reality; and according to Aristotle a play is 'an imitation of an action, and not the action itself'. Even the famous Passion Play of Abydos, which recounts the death, burial and resurrection of the god Osiris, is really a directive for a corporate religious exercise. Before we can talk of theatre we must wait for something a little further removed from reality.

It follows therefore that the first great theatrical age in the history of Western civilization is that of Greece in the fifth century BC. It was there that tragedies and comedies, some of which still exist, were first performed by actors and not by priests, in special buildings or precincts which, though hallowed, were not temples. The ruins of some of these still stand, and provide us with archaeological evidence. There is also some documentation of both performances and buildings, and the influence of both can be traced in the European and American theatre up to the present day.



1 (*left*) The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens as it is today. During successive reconstructions it has lost the circular orchestra which survives at Epidaurus (*see Ill. 14*), but the base of the altar of Dionysus can still be seen in the centre of the semicircle



2 (*right*) Greek actor holding a tragic mask and wearing a short chiton and high boots (*cothurni*), from a vase-painting of the late fourth century BC. The mask is that of a strong, handsome hero in the prime of life, with fair hair and beard

The origin of the modern theatre can be found in the dithyramb (or unison hymn) sung round the altar of Dionysus, the wine-god whose cult had spread to Greece from the Near East, by a chorus of fifty men, five from each of the ten tribes of Attica. The process of evolution from this simple act of worship to the full-scale Greek tragedy as we find it in classical Athens must have been a slow one, and it is not possible to pinpoint exactly the various stages. But in the earliest plays we find again the fifty members of the chorus, and *Ill. 1* always in the centre of the stage is the altar of Dionysus. The lyric form of the dithyramb accounts for the sung choruses in the play, and its poetic content. Most important of all, the widening of the scope of the dithyramb, which originally dealt only with the life and worship of Dionysus, to include tales of demi-gods or heroes, legendary ancestors of the Greeks and their associate peoples, is reflected in the plays. The deeds of these heroes, good or bad, their wars, feuds, marriages and adulteries, and the destinies of their children, who so often suffered for the sins of their parents, are a source of dramatic tension, and give rise to the essential element of

conflict – between man and god, good and evil, child and parent, duty and inclination. This may lead to comprehension and reconciliation between the conflicting elements – since a Greek tragedy need not necessarily end unhappily – or to incomprehension and chaos. The plots of all Greek plays were already well known to the audience. They formed part of its religious and cultural heritage, for many of them dated from Homeric times. The interest for the spectator lay, therefore, not in the novelty of the story, but in seeing how the dramatist had chosen to deal with it, and, no doubt, in assessing the quality of the acting, and the work of the chorus, both in singing and dancing, about which unfortunately we know very little.

But Greek drama was not confined to tragedy. Even at its most reverent, the human spirit needs relaxation, and comedy crept in with the revels which took place in the villages when the harvest had been safely gathered in. They were enlivened by the antics of the satyrs – half men, half goats – who were the attendants of Dionysus. *Ill. 3* It was from their fooling, and from the rough horseplay of other village festivals, that the first true comedies of the theatre developed.

The dithyramb probably continued for some time to extend its scope without achieving any dramatic content. Something, some new element, was needed if worship was to become theatre. And since the natural human reaction to any form of communal activity, when the time comes to catalogue it, is to identify each phase with some recognizable person, it is not surprising that the honour of inaugurating the theatre should be ascribed to one man, Thespis, the leader of a dithyrambic chorus whose name has become synonymous with acting – the 'Thespian art' – just as 'robes of Thespis' means theatrical costume. Thespis is said to have travelled from Icaria, his birthplace, with his chorus, carrying his belongings on a cart whose *Ill. 3* floor and tailboard could form an improvised stage. In the course of his wanderings from one festival to another he eventually reached Athens, and there, as was only right and proper, he was the first to win a prize at the newly established dramatic festival, the City Dionysia.

The great innovation that Thespis made was to detach himself from the chorus and, in the person of the god or hero whose deeds were being celebrated, to engage in dialogue with it. He was thus the first actor as well as the first manager. The step he took was even more revolutionary than it seems to us, for he was the first unsanctified person who dared to assume the character of a god. This had hitherto been the prerogative of the priests or kings, who by virtue of their office were already partly deified. The way was now open for the independent development of the actor and of a building suited to his needs. The early theatres of Greece, like the one at Delphi, for *Ill. 4* instance, were always built near a temple. They continued to be the focal point of a corporate act of worship, but the interpretation of the plays acted in them was entrusted to men who were primarily actors, and only by tradition servants of Dionysus. The spectators too, among whom were some of the former actor-priests, changed. They were still conscious of the religious significance of the play, but they began to judge it as a work of art, and eventually as entertainment, and so became an audience rather than a congregation.

Of the three main festivals of Greece, the Rural Dionysia, held in mid-winter and laying stress on Dionysus as the god of fertility, gave

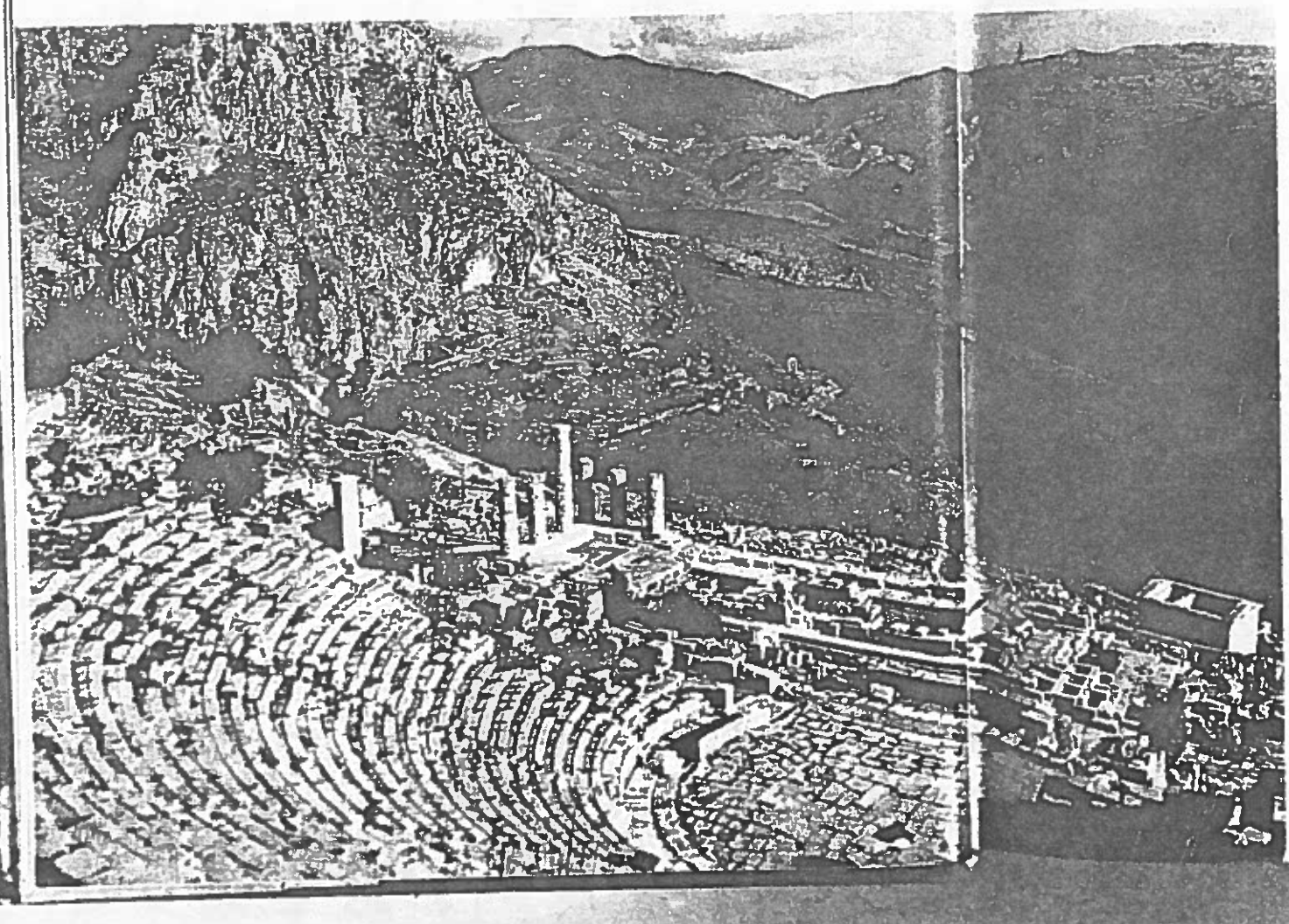
3 The Cart of Thespis, a reconstruction from an Attic vase-painting. Dionysus attended by satyrs is shown on his way to the City Dionysia

to the theatre the leader of the chorus, who was probably the headman of the village, and also the word for tragedy (from *tragos*, a goat, either because a goat was sacrificed on the first day, or given as a prize on the last). The January festival, the Lenaea, was mainly devoted to merry-making, with elements which contributed to the later development of comedy (the word comes from *comos*, a revel or masquerade). But the festival for which all the extant Greek plays were written, as well as many others which are now lost, was the City Dionysia, celebrated at Athens in April, and attended not only by all able-bodied citizens, but also by official representatives of the federated and allied states. Arrangements began about ten months in advance. Poets who wished to compete had first to submit their works to the presiding officers, who chose three plays for performance. To each poet was then assigned by lot a leading actor, and a patron, or *choregus*, a wealthy man who as part of his civic duties paid all the expenses of the production. The actors were paid by the state. The author of the play composed the music for it, and arranged the dances. Until specialists took over, he also trained the chorus. And until actors increased in numbers and importance he often played the chief part himself.

The first day of the City Dionysia was given over to the splendid procession which is depicted on the frieze of the Parthenon. The actors took part in it, wearing their stage clothes, but without masks. The next three days were devoted to tragedies, and the fourth to comedies, though later on the comedies were given in the evenings, after the tragedies, which began at dawn. Each writer of tragedy had to contribute three plays, either a trilogy on one theme, or three separate plays on a linked theme, and a satyr-play, about which little is known. It seems to have been a bawdy comic comment on the main theme of the tragedies, and was retained as a link with the early worship of Dionysus. Comic dramatists were limited to one play each. A prize was awarded to the best comedy and the best tragedy, to the best production (hence the importance of having a generous *choregus*) and later to the best tragic actor, who need not necessarily have appeared in the winning play.

Of the many poets who wrote for the City Dionysia, and whose names and play-titles we know from various catalogues compiled in ancient times, the earliest and perhaps the best was Aeschylus. Born in about 525 BC, he was known in his lifetime as a soldier and a citizen as well as a poet. He fought at Marathon and Salamis, and died in 456 BC, while on a visit to Syracuse. He is believed to have written about eighty or ninety plays, of which we have seven complete texts and numerous fragments. His *Oresteia* is the only example of a dramatic trilogy which has survived. In his plays we can follow the development of the Greek theatre. In the earliest the chorus still numbers fifty, as in the dithyramb, and there is only one

Ills. 5, 6



4 (*left*) The Theatre and Temple of Apollo at Delphi, fourth century BC

5 (*below*) Clytemnestra killing Cassandra, from a vase-painting of *c.* 430 BC. This episode from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* took place off-stage. The costumes probably depict those worn on-stage, both parts being played by men

actor. Later the chorus is reduced to twelve, and a second actor is introduced, followed eventually by a third. All Aeschylus' plays are powerful, majestic, and written in superb verse. After his death they were often revived, though normally only new plays were given at the festival, and they are still well-known and often acted in translation, particularly the first part of the *Oresteia*, which deals with the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra.

The next well-known dramatist of Athens was Sophocles, who was younger than Aeschylus and of a very different temperament. His most productive period of playwriting coincided with the finest phase of Athenian history, under Pericles. He too wrote about ninety plays, of which seven survive, and won eighteen prizes, always the first or second, never the third. His last play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, a sequel to the better known *Oedipus the King*, which has often been
Ill. 262 revived in the modern theatre, was written at the end of his long life – he was ninety when he died – and produced posthumously. Sophocles, who was of a serene and well-balanced disposition, handsome, successful and highly esteemed by his contemporaries, was a less powerful writer than Aeschylus, whose themes were cosmic, but more humane, more closely concerned with the complexities of human relationships as opposed to those of gods and men. His plots are more complex, his characterization, as in his *Antigone* and *Electra*, more subtle, his lyrics more flexible and harmonious. Greek tragedy, in his plays, is moving away from the simplicity and severity of its origins, and the chorus, which he increased from twelve to fifteen, probably for some technical reason connected with the pattern of the choral dances, is less closely integrated into the action.

The innovations of Sophocles were continued by his younger contemporary Euripides, the last great writer of Greek tragedy. Born in about 484 BC, he died in 406, the same year as Sophocles. He was a man of good family, something of a recluse, and more of an individualist than either of his predecessors. Among his plays, of which eighteen survive out of a possible ninety-two, is the *Cyclops*, the only complete satyr-play which we now have. Sceptical, modern in outlook, and as he got older, increasingly outspoken, Euripides was evidently less popular in his own day than Aeschylus and

6 Apollo protecting Orestes from the Furies, a scene from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, shown in a vase-painting of *c.* 370

Sophocles, winning a prize only five times. His plays were more easily understood and appreciated by later generations, which may account for the number that have survived, and they are still popular today. They are unusually realistic, no longer pure tragedies, but tragi-comedies, even melodramas. Several of them are studies of abnormal states of mind, and he was interested in problems of feminine psychology. Among his innovations was the use of the prologue, in the modern sense of the word, to summarize the situation at the opening of the play. He also accelerated the process by which the chorus became less and less important. In some of his plays – the *Medea*, for instance, and the *Hippolytus* – which deal with the emotions of individuals rather than the great public events debated in earlier tragedies, he must have found the chorus an encumbrance, and his successors tended to dispense with it altogether, using a vestigial group of singers and dancers to break up the action with independent interludes.

While tragedy was developing in the hands of these three dramatists, the various forms of comedy fused to produce the plays of Aristophanes, who was born in 448 BC and died in 380. He is the only comic dramatist of Athens of whom we have complete plays; of others we have only fragments. But, like Shakespeare, he seems to embody in himself half a dozen writers. Much of his comedy is ephemeral and closely related to the politics and social customs of his own day. The best of it defies translation. Yet so strong is the tradition of his genius that his name is used as a label for bawdy, topical and sophisticated comedy in all countries. We have eleven of the forty plays which he is known to have written, and many of them take their titles from the disguises assumed by the chorus – *Knights*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, *Clouds*, *Frogs*. And it is mainly through the chorus that the author's satire is conveyed. The basic idea in each play is comic in itself, and is reinforced by a series of loosely-connected incidents which give full scope to the inventiveness of both author and actor, for here, as always in comedy, the actor contributed much to the final effect. No modern writer could hope to get away with the invective, social satire, personal criticism, buffoonery and obscenity of the bulk of Aristophanes' work. In translation the wit and savagery tend to evaporate. A modern audience knows too little about the background to be able to appreciate the topical allusions. All that can be done is to stress the universal as opposed to the contemporary aspects of the play, perhaps with discreet modernization of some incidents. In this way most of the plays have been revived, notably the *Birds* and the *Frogs* in modern Greek by the Greek Art Theatre under Karolos Koun.

Ill. 7

The actors in Greek tragedy, whose costumes we know mainly from Greek vase-paintings of theatrical scenes, wore elaborate robes, often brightly coloured and heavily embroidered, and high boots (*cothurni*) in imitation of their god, Dionysus. Later their robes were padded and their height increased by a head-dress (*onkos*) and by thick soles under the boots. This, in the vast open-air theatres of the time, gave them an impressive dignity suitable to the characters they portrayed and enhanced their stage presence. The most important feature of their costume was the mask, said to have been introduced by Thespis. In light wood, cork or linen, this enabled the three actors in a tragedy to play several parts each, and also, in a theatre staffed entirely by men, to impersonate women. Each mask – more than thirty types are known to have existed – indicated not only the age, standing and sex of the character, but the dominant emotion – fear, rage, hate, despair. The actor, denied the use of facial expression and limited by his costume to broad sweeping gestures, was forced to rely on the range and expressiveness of his voice for most of his effects. Even after the reforms of Euripides – who was criticized by

Ills. 5, 6
Ill. 2
Ill. 23

Ills. 2, 11, 23

7 Actors dressed as birds, from a vase-painting of *c.* 500 BC. Although earlier than Aristophanes' comedy, this scene may indicate how the chorus in his *Birds* was dressed. The costume perpetuates the traditional use of animal disguises in early religious ceremonies

8 (*left*) Hellenistic statuette of a comic actor wearing a mask, from Tralles in Turkey

9 (*above*) Archaic Punic comic mask from Tunis

10 (*right*) Hellenistic comic mask from Athens

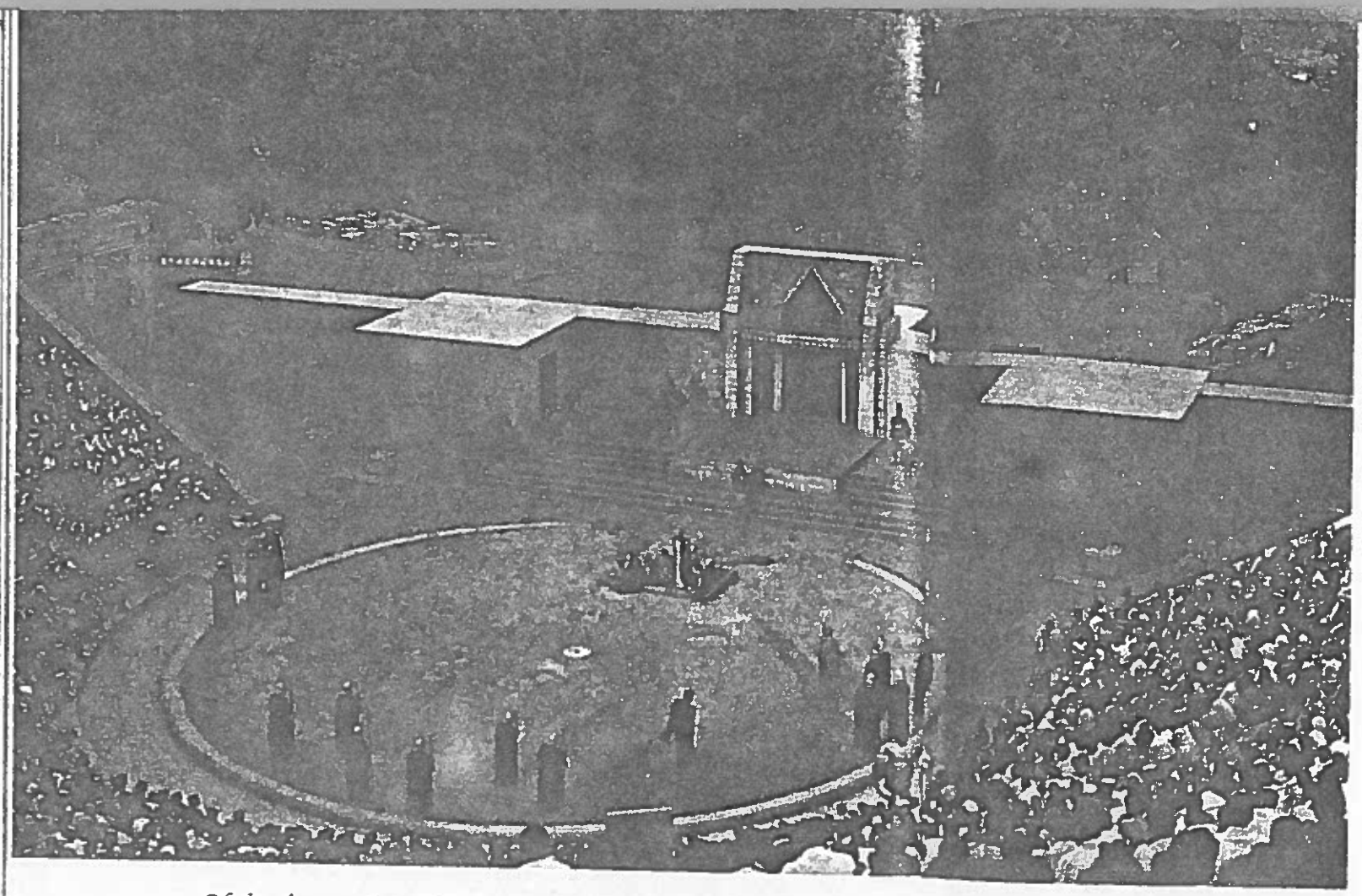
11 (*far right*) A marble replica of the mask of a tragic heroine. This is a late Roman example of the 'fair, long-haired, tragic heroine' but is probably modelled on earlier Greek masks

Aristophanes in one of his comedies for dressing his actors 'in rags' – the Greek tragic actor remained a static, godlike creature, speaking and singing in harmony with specially composed music, all of which is lost, and sinking his individuality in the character he portrayed. The chorus, who needed more freedom of movement, wore the dress of the people they represented, and light masks.

The costume of the comic actor was, as might be expected, less hampering, since he needed to be something of an acrobat. He usually wore soft slippers (*socci*), flesh-coloured tights, a short tunic, grotesquely padded, and in the comedies of the time of Aristophanes, a large red leather phallus. Masks were exaggerated for comic effect. The attendants of Dionysus in the satyr-play wore short furry breeches to which were attached a tail and a phallus.

Ills. 12, 13
Ill. 10

12–13 (*right*) Actors in Old Comedy, statuettes of the mid-fourth century BC. On the left, a slave who is pretending to be deaf, or who has just received a box on the ear; right, two drunken slaves or revellers, wearing tights, padded jackets and the phallus



14 A modern performance in the restored theatre at Epidaurus, showing its steep auditorium and well-preserved orchestra

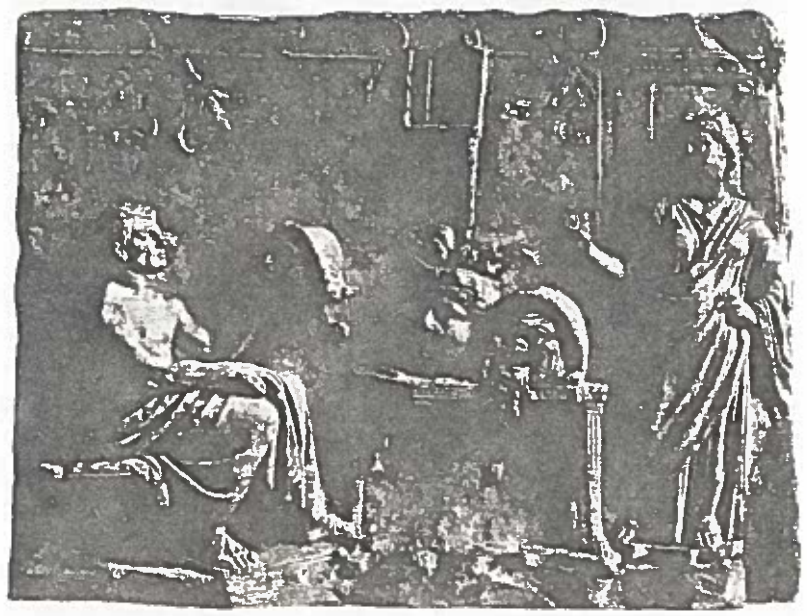
Of the theatres in which the Greek plays were first performed little survives, but it is possible to reconstruct the essential details, either from later buildings, or from the architectural evidence of the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, which has several times been *Ill. 1* remodelled. The heart of the theatre was the original dancing-place, the flat circular space with the altar of Dionysus in the centre which was used by the chorus. This orchestra, as it was called, is admirably *Ill. 14* preserved in the theatre at Epidaurus, which is still used for an annual summer dramatic festival. The musicians probably sat or

stood on the altar steps. In a horseshoe shape round the orchestra, on rising ground, sat the audience, first on the bare hill-side, later on wooden benches, later still on stone or marble seats. In the centre of the front row were the elaborate stone seats reserved for the priest of Dionysus, to whom the god himself appeals for help in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and other high officials and state visitors. Entrance was at first free. Later a small charge was made. Poor citizens were then given the necessary entrance money, since attendance at the City Dionysia was practically compulsory.

Behind the orchestra there was, probably from very early times, a stage building reminiscent of the front of the original temple. It served the practical purpose of providing the actors with a background and a sounding-board, and of concealing the dressing-rooms, the stage machinery and such properties as might be needed – the red carpet in the *Agamemnon*, the head of Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, Hector's shield in the *Trojan Women*. It was pierced by a large central double door with a smaller door on each side, by which the actors came and went. The chorus entered along two passages between the stage building and the auditorium which could also be used by the audience as it assembled. The most important part of the stage machinery was the crane (*machine*) by which the god could descend from heaven to sort out the complications of the plot (whence the expression *deus ex machina*), but there was also a wheeled platform on which a pre-arranged tableau could be shown, and a machine for imitating thunder. There was no scenery in the modern sense of the word, but the stage wall provided an increasingly elaborate architectural background, and on each side of the stage were the *periaktoi*. These were triangular prisms which could be rotated to indicate symbolically a change of scene by means of a painted tree, a column, or waves.

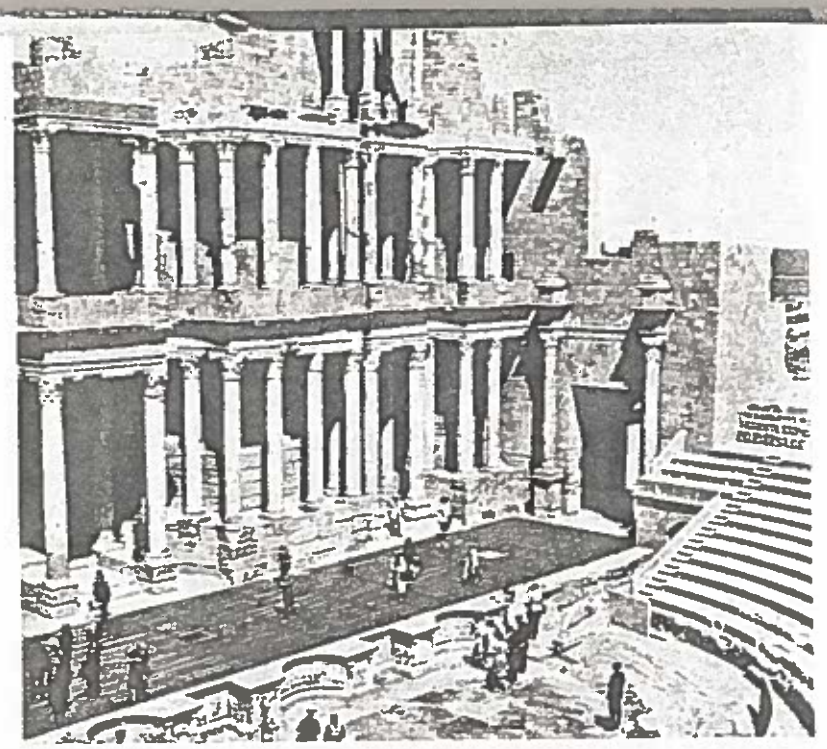
It seems reasonable to suppose, in view of the size of the theatres, that there was, in front of the stage building and behind the orchestra, a raised platform for the actors, to make them easier to see, and to single them out from the chorus. Certainly in later times there was *Ill. 1* quite a high stage, with a marble frieze below and a short flight of steps up from the orchestra.

By the time the great stone buildings which we think of as typically Greek were in use, the control of the theatre had passed from the dramatists to the actors, as happened frequently in later theatre history, and the great days of Greek drama were over. Comedy was *Ill. 15* paramount, but the only writer of note was Menander, who was born about 342 BC and died in 292. Only five of his plays have survived, and these are incomplete, but he had an immense reputation in antiquity, and enough fragments of his work remain to enable us to assess the main features of his 'New Comedy', as it was called, to



15 Menander in his studio with New Comedy masks, from a relief now in Rome. The masks are those of three of Menander's chief characters: a young man, a courtesan and an angry father. The girl on the right, who is perhaps holding another mask, may be the Muse of Comedy, or Menander's mistress, Glykera

16 A scene from a Roman comedy, before AD 79, from a Pompeiian wall-painting. It appears to depict a jeering slave who has surprised a pair of lovers



17 The Roman theatre at Sabratha, the largest in North Africa. Built about AD 200, this has the typical Roman semicircular orchestra, raised stage and elaborate three-storey *frons scaenae*

distinguish it from the Old Comedy of Aristophanes. It is markedly different, being pleasantly humorous, politically inoffensive, dealing superficially with comic situations of contemporary urban life, and hardly satiric at all, though still bawdy. Its fabricated plots tell of family matters, missing children, delayed marriages, mislaid treasure, *Ills. 18, 19* in all of which the wily and astute slave plays a leading part. It is, in fact, a romantic comedy of manners which has lost all traces of its religious origins, and in which the chorus no longer has a place.

It was this type of Greek comedy, played in the vast Hellenistic theatres with their high stages and elaborate scene-buildings, which the Romans came into contact with as they extended their empire southwards into Greece. Easily understood and assimilated, it was *Ill. 20* imported into Italy, where it underwent some significant changes, and gave rise to the works of the two main writers of Roman comedy

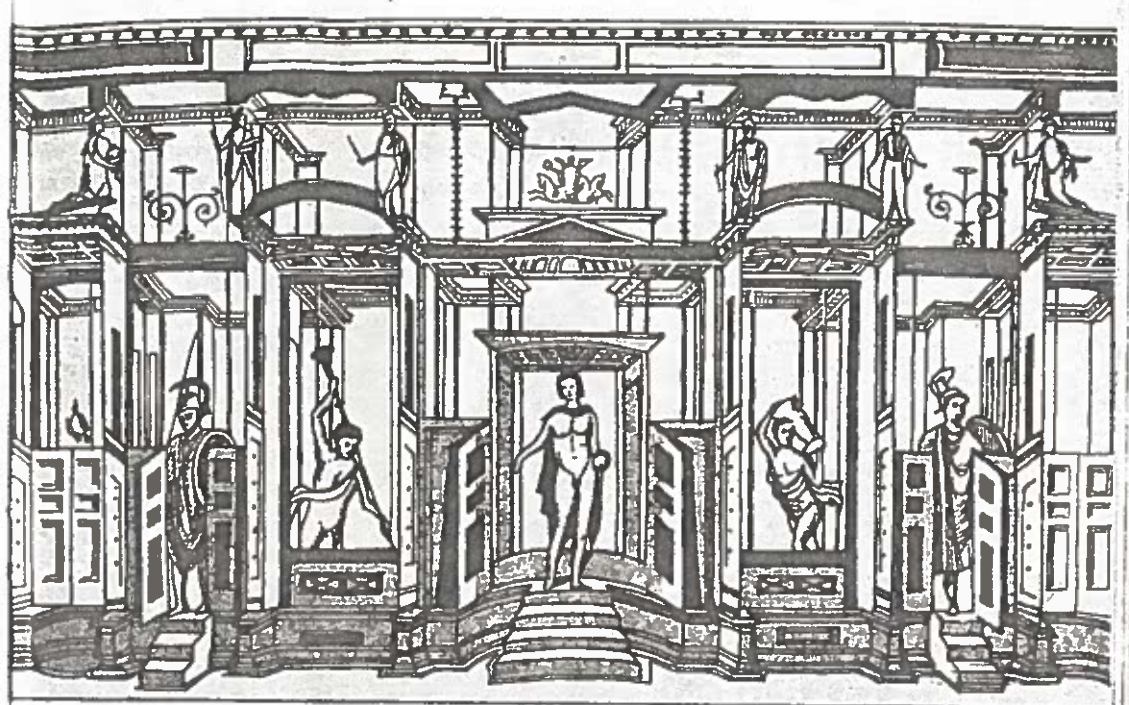
18–19 (*right*) Actors in New Comedy, probably characters in plays based on, though not necessarily by, Menander. The statuette on the left represents a potter or drinker, the one on the right a money-lender or dealer, or a thieving slave

20 A scene from Terence's *Adelphi*, in a later copy of a fourth- or fifth-century original. It shows Aeschinus and his brother Ctesipho confronted by the slave-dealer Sannio (led by their slave Syrus) from whom they have stolen a girl Ctesipho loves

(*fabula palliata*). Plautus and Terence. From it they took their plots and many of the stock characters, the irascible old men, the young profligates, the officious slaves, who make up the *dramatis personae* of their plays.

Plautus, of whose plays twenty survive, was primarily a translator and adaptor, basing his comedies on Greek originals now lost, but transferring the action to Rome and introducing recognizable details of Roman life and manners. His characters are sharply differentiated types. Among them can be found the braggart soldier (*miles gloriosus*), the miser, the parasite, the identical twins (whose adventures provided Shakespeare with the material for his *Comedy of Errors*), and always the browbeaten but resourceful slave whose actions provide the mainspring of most of the comedies. Plautus was an excellent craftsman, and his plays act better than they read. Terence, a freed slave from Africa, had more originality and was a better writer, since, owing to the kindness of an aristocratic patron, he was better educated. In his plays, of which six survive, there are *Ill. 20* fewer topical allusions and less buffoonery than in Plautus, and the application of his plots and dialogue is more universal. Perhaps for these reasons they became unpopular with audiences whose taste ran more to rope dancing, gladiators, and players of pantomime. But like Seneca, whose tragedies were written to be read and not for the stage, both Plautus and Terence were destined to have an enormous influence on the dramatists of a much later and far different age from their own.

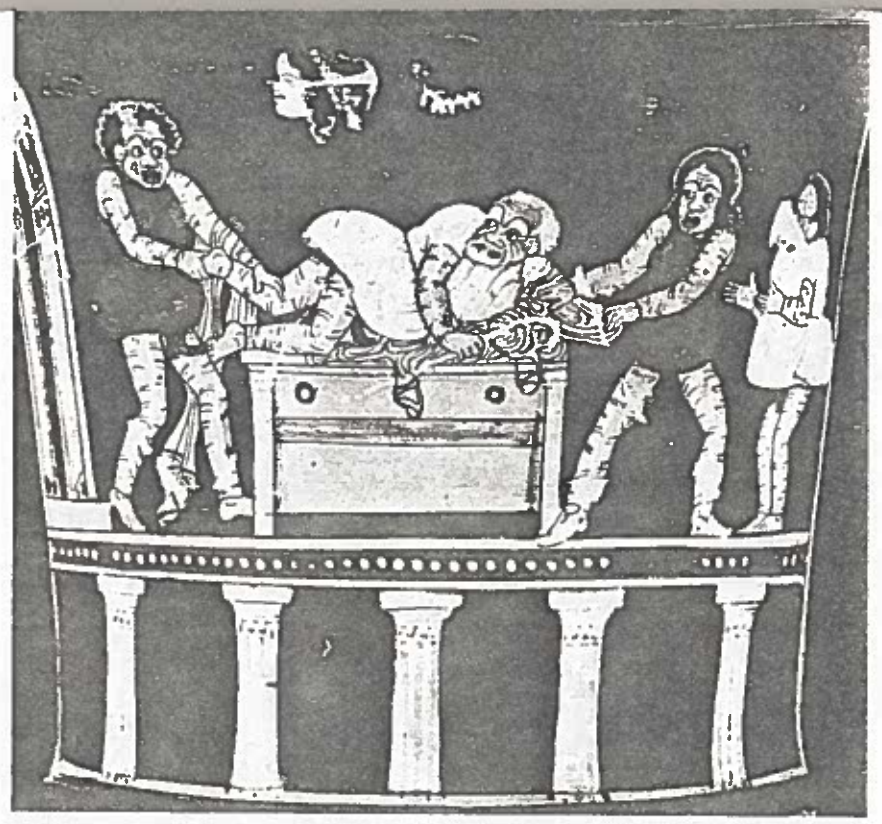
While the written comedies of Plautus and Terence languished for lack of audiences, the short rustic farce of southern Italy, the *fabula atellana*, gained in popularity. Its appeal was based on the purely Roman humour of the clowns Maccus and Bucco, the foolish old man Pappus, and the hunchbacked slave Dossennus. Imported into Rome, it abandoned the use of dialect, and replaced its impromptu plots by formal written texts, of which a few titles survive. In the form in which it flourished under the dictatorship of Sulla it provided the only truly indigenous type of Roman drama. It evidently had very little literary value, and its appeal was immediate and ephemeral. But it deserves to be mentioned because of the curious parallels



21 A Roman mime play, before AD 79, showing the elaborately built-up stage with three entrances and an upper storey. On stage, a young hero, two warriors, and two slaves at the rear, one with a torch, the other with a wine-jar, evidently making preparations for a feast

it presents to the early manifestations of the later Italian popular drama, the *commedia dell'arte* (see Chapter 3).

The theatres of the Roman world were very different from those of Greece. They were built on flat ground, not on a hillside, with a vast surrounding wall of masonry, often elaborately decorated. *Ill. 17* With the disappearance of the chorus the last link with the dithyramb had been severed, and the orchestra was no longer needed. The focal point of the Roman theatre building was therefore the high stage, with tiers of benches in front and an elaborate stage wall, the *frons scaenae*, behind, often two storeys high. This stage had obvious *Ill. 21* affinities with the primitive temporary platforms – the *phlyakes* stages



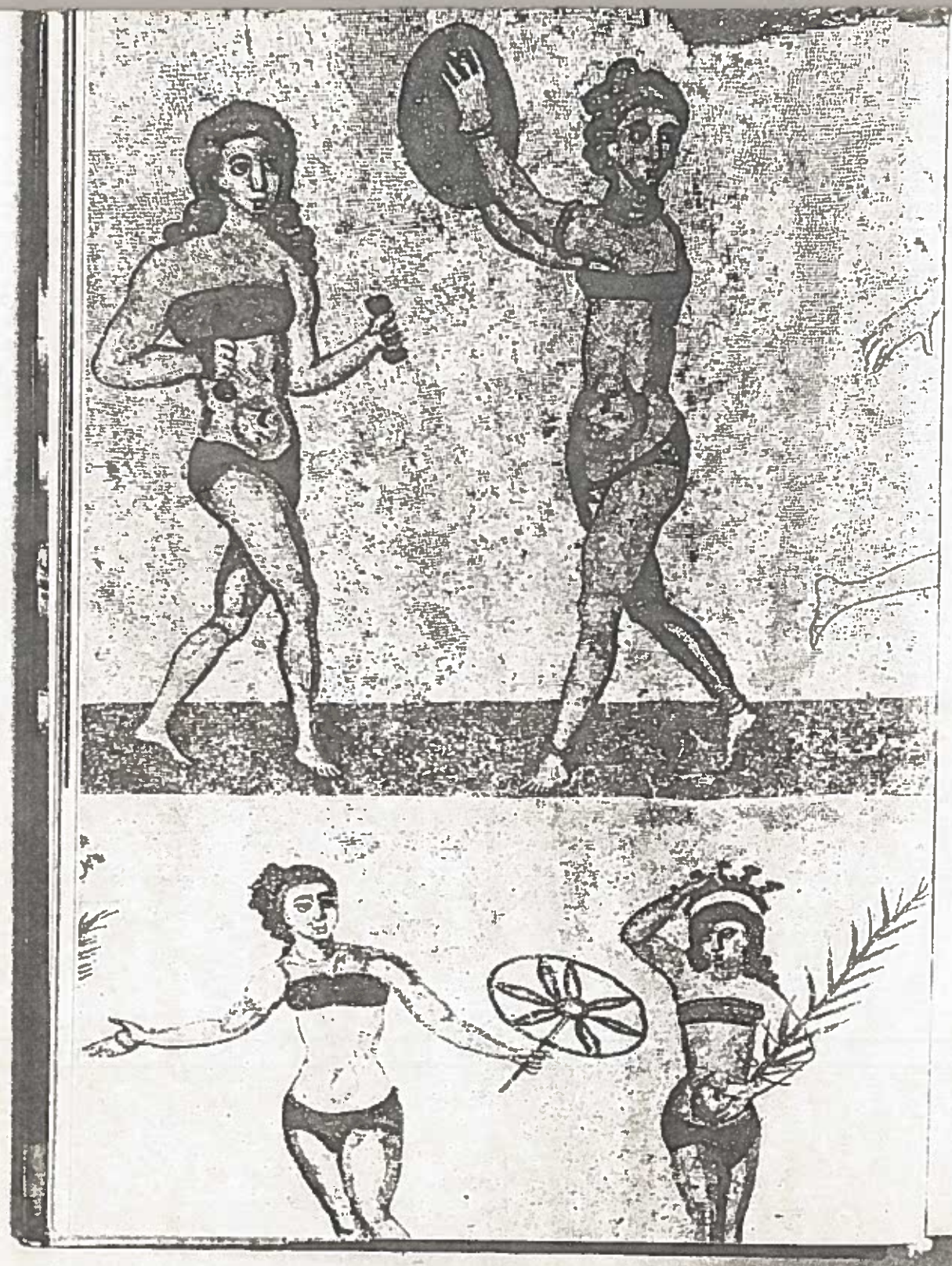
22 On a *phlyakes* stage with supporting pillars and a side entrance (*see also Ill. 20*), a miser, Charinus, is trying to protect his treasure-chest from thieves. A vase-painting of the mid-fourth century BC. It was probably from temporary stages like this that the typical Roman stage (*see Ill. 17*) developed

– on which farcical mime-plays had been performed in southern Italy up to about 300 BC. One can see from the many extant vase-paintings of *phlyakes* performances how the high platform with
Ill. 22 panels or curtains developed, and also how grotesquely costumed and exaggeratedly comic the mime-players were in the travesties of Greek tragedy or in the plays based on the amorous adventures of Zeus and the Seven Labours of Hercules which made up much of their repertory.

By the first centuries of the new era Roman theatres had been built all over Italy, in Spain and France, and in the colonies of North Africa. Some of them are still in an excellent state of preservation and

23 Tragic actor with mask, showing the high wig (*onkos*), a wall-painting from Herculaneum, therefore before AD 79. Judging by his untidy hair, the seated actor has just taken off his tragic mask, which can be seen on the far right. The man at the back is probably his dresser

one can see how imposing they must have been when they were *Ill. 17*
newly built. They had every embellishment, including a curtain which disappeared into a trough at the front of the stage. For the spectators there were awnings, fruit-sellers and, on hot days, showers of perfumed water. But they were beautiful empty shells, housing a dying art. The performances seen in them could not compare with those in the simple wooden buildings of early Greek times. Their staple fare was bawdy and obscene mimes and farces dealing mainly with drunkenness, greed, adultery and horseplay, or lavish acrobatic spectacles featuring scantily clad dancers. Actors, who in Greece had *Ill. 24*
been citizens of good repute, were no longer esteemed. Roscius,



whose name has become synonymous with good acting, was perhaps an honourable exception, but even Cicero, who defended him in a lawsuit, thought of drama as something to be read. Theatrical performances, once the glory of Greece, and of some importance even in Republican Rome, became under the Empire little more than a vulgar form of popular entertainment. The time came when they were forbidden altogether. Forgetful of its religious origins and its glorious past, the theatre, as so often in its history, seemed to die of its own inanity, only to revive, more strongly than ever, in an unexpected direction.

◀ 24 (*left*) 'Bikini'-clad girls dancing in a Roman aquatic spectacle, from a mosaic of the late third century AD. 'Water-ballets' were very popular with Roman audiences, and for these, and for the production of *naumachiae* (mock sea-battles), the orchestra – even that of the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens (*see Ill. 1*) – was sealed round and flooded

25 Roman masks of a slave and a flute-player